

AMERICA'S  
***PrepareAthon!***  
BE SMART. TAKE PART. PREPARE.

# PREPARE YOUR PEOPLE FOR HURRICANE SAFETY

## WORKPLACES



## INTRODUCTION

Everyone has a role to play in preparing for a disaster. This day of action guide, *Prepare Your People for Hurricane Safety*, is designed to help you improve your employees' readiness for a hurricane by moving them to take action. It provides guidance on how to hold a hurricane preparedness discussion and conduct a short drill as a day of action for your workplace. Many individuals within your organization can lead this effort; you may be a manager or employee involved in business operations, human resources, facilities management, or another program. Please see *A Playbook for Your Day of Action: Workplaces* for information and resources to make implementation easy.

America's PrepareAthon! also offers the *Prepare Your Organization for Hurricane Safety: Workplaces* day of action guide to help your organization assess and improve its ability to maintain or re-establish operations when affected by a hurricane.

## HURRICANE PREPAREDNESS

People at risk from a hurricane may need to evacuate their home with little notice and be away for several days, possibly even for weeks. Items left behind could become soaked with dirty floodwater and be difficult to clean or recover. After the floodwaters recede, rebuilding lives will require documentation for insurance claims and for assistance from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) or other sources.

To be prepared for a hurricane, it's important to be ready to evacuate quickly. This means monitoring alerts and warnings information, having a family communication plan, knowing evacuation routes, and having personal items and documents in order. The *How to Prepare for a Hurricane* guide provides additional information on hurricane basics, how to protect yourself and your property, and what steps to take now.

## BEFORE YOUR DAY OF ACTION

- Review the America's PrepareAthon! *How to Prepare for a Hurricane* guide at [www.ready.gov/prepare](http://www.ready.gov/prepare).
- Use the *Be Smart. Know Your Alerts and Warnings* worksheet to identify relevant local national alerts systems, and find out what your organization uses to monitor severe weather.
- Establish procedures for notifying all facility occupants when a hurricane warning is issued or whenever they need to take action to protect themselves. If texts or emails will be used, make sure employees' contact information has been entered in your notification system.
- Review the *Be Smart. Protect Your Critical Documents and Valuables* checklist or the more comprehensive Emergency Financial First Aid Kit (EFFAK) at [www.ready.gov/financialpreparedness](http://www.ready.gov/financialpreparedness). The EFFAK provides templates to help individuals and families collect the documentation they would need after a disaster to get on the road to recovery without unnecessary delays.
- Review the information at [www.ready.gov/individuals-access-functional-needs](http://www.ready.gov/individuals-access-functional-needs) and consider the needs of individuals in your organization with access and functional needs.
- If you are sending mock severe weather notifications as a drill on your day of action, identify an individual to manage the drill and coordinate communications about it. Publicize the drill in advance to encourage participation, and visit [www.ready.gov/prepare](http://www.ready.gov/prepare) to download free customizable promotional materials.
- Reach out to your local emergency management agency to find out about local alert and warning systems. Discuss how you can determine if your day of action leads to an increase in the number of subscribers.

## HOLD A HURRICANE PREPAREDNESS DISCUSSION

With more than 65 percent of the U.S. population aged 16 and older in the labor force,<sup>1</sup> the workplace is one of the most effective places to reach people with information about preparing for potential disasters. In addition, research shows there is a strong relationship between talking about preparedness and taking action.<sup>2</sup> The America's PrepareAthon! hurricane preparedness discussion is designed as a short, structured session to emphasize the steps your employees should take to be ready.

Encourage meeting participants to bring mobile phones to the meeting so they can sign up for local and national alerts and notifications and download relevant weather-related apps. (An alternative for those who don't have a smartphone is to prepare an electronic or hard-copy file documenting where they can find information about local weather and the company's severe weather alerting system.)

### GOALS

- Ensure employees know the basics about hurricanes and know how to find out their risk.
- Ensure employees understand the importance of being able to receive important severe weather alerts and warnings.
- Ensure employees know your organization's emergency communications plan and procedures.
- Encourage employees to share their experiences and talk about hurricane preparedness with their families, friends, and neighbors.

### TIME

15–30 minutes. You can cover the basics in as little as 15 minutes. Half an hour will provide time for more discussion.

### SETTING

Consider adding your hurricane preparedness discussion to the agenda of your next staff meeting or arranging a brown bag lunch session. Do what works best to get the conversation started.

## SUGGESTED AGENDA

Use the *How to Prepare for a Hurricane* guide as a reference for the discussion.

1. **Hurricane Basics:** Remind employees that many parts of the United States experience heavy rains, strong winds, floods, and coastal storm surges each year from tropical storms and hurricanes. Areas affected include all Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico coastal areas, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Hawaii, parts of the Southwest, and the Pacific Coast. The U.S. territories in the Pacific are at risk for typhoons, which are a tropical cyclone in the North Pacific Ocean. The Atlantic hurricane season lasts from June to November, with the peak season lasting from mid-August to late October. The Eastern Pacific hurricane season begins May 15 and ends November 30.
2. **Alerts and Warnings:** Provide employees with the *Be Smart. Know Your Alerts and Warnings* worksheet, which outlines available alerts, notifications, apps, and other resources available by location and hazard. Share

<sup>1</sup> 2010 U.S. Census.

<sup>2</sup> Preparedness in America, September 2013, [www.fema.gov/media-library/assets/documents/71100](http://www.fema.gov/media-library/assets/documents/71100).



which local and national alert systems your organization monitors in the event of severe weather. Encourage employees to sign up for local text alerts on their phones. Also, discuss how you will receive alerts and notification if the power is out.

3. **Emergency Communications, Policies, and Procedures:** Provide employees with a copy of the company's emergency policies and procedures, including information about office closures, telecommuting, and communications. Let people know how they will be notified in an emergency (e.g., text alerts, email, public address system). As appropriate, make sure employees know your company's emergency hotline number, know how to access important information about workplace responsibilities during a disaster, and are signed up to receive text alerts or emails if they are available. Be sure to include and discuss the needs of individuals with access and functional needs.
4. **Hurricane Preparedness:** Explain basic preparations for a hurricane, including learning whether your property is flood-prone, knowing how to prepare an emergency kit, securing your property against high winds and water damage, and knowing community evacuation routes.
  - Encourage employees to think about which community evacuation routes to take, how they would get in touch with their family, and what they would want to take with them.
  - Hand out the *Be Smart. Protect Your Critical Documents and Valuables* checklist and encourage employees to note what documents they should collect and keep in a safe place. Refer them to the Emergency Financial First Aid Kit (EFFAK) at [www.ready.gov/financialpreparedness](http://www.ready.gov/financialpreparedness) for more complete information about the critical personal documents they may need in the event of a disaster.
5. **Note: If you are conducting a day of action hurricane drill:** You can conduct the drill on the same day as your discussion or a few days later. Tell meeting attendees that the upcoming hurricane drill will include mock emergency notifications to simulate how the organization will communicate with its employees in the event of other severe weather or disasters. Tell meeting attendees that the drill will focus on encouraging employees to sign up for personal alerts, download apps, and check out other resources for up-to-date weather information as one important step to becoming prepared to evacuate. However, there are other important steps, including knowing evacuation routes, having a family communication plan, and having personal items and documents in order.

**Materials:** Have copies of the *How to Prepare for a Hurricane* guide and *Be Smart. Know Your Alerts and Warnings* as handouts. Email or distribute the links to these as well as to the *Playbook for Individuals and Families* and *Be Smart. Protect Your Critical Documents and Valuables* as advance reading or as followup.

## CONDUCT A HURRICANE DRILL

Conducting a drill with realistic emails of severe weather warnings can help people better imagine what a real hurricane situation would feel like. This kind of practice scenario can make all the difference in motivating people to take action. While being fully prepared may require additional actions, this hurricane drill is designed to encourage your employees to take one simple step now that will help them react and recover faster if a disaster happens. The hurricane drill will focus on the important step of signing up for important alerts and warning information as a way of encouraging more individuals to start the preparedness process. Encourage employees to review the America's PrepareAthon! *How to Prepare for a Hurricane* guide for more information on hurricane preparedness. This drill will also provide the chance to test your communications systems and identify any necessary improvements, so you'll be ready in a real emergency. Included are sample notifications and tips for a post-drill discussion. The drill and followup discussion can be conducted in less than an hour.

### DRILL OVERVIEW

On the day of the drill, your coordinator will send a notification through your organization's normal messaging channels to all drill participants about a hurricane that is expected to make landfall in the area. The first notification provides an update on a hurricane watch. The second notification informs participants that the National Hurricane Center has now upgraded the hurricane watch to a hurricane warning.

After sending the two notifications and allowing time for participants to sign up for local alerts and notifications, send an "all clear" message telling participants them the drill is over. Remind participants that the company conducted this drill because hurricanes are possible in their area and that it's important to prepare.

The schedule below shows the suggested order of events for the drill.

### SAMPLE SCHEDULE

Time	Action
1:00 p.m.	Participants receive notification that the National Hurricane Center has issued a hurricane watch for communities in the area. Participants are instructed to stay informed by monitoring the weather through apps, radio stations, or other resources.
1:30 p.m.	Participants receive a second notification informing them that the National Hurricane Center has issued a hurricane warning and it expects the storm to make landfall in their area within the next 36 hours. Participants are encouraged to stay informed by signing up for personal alerts and to prepare themselves and their families for the storm.
1:37 p.m.	Participants receive an "all clear" message telling them the drill is over. Remind participants how important it is to prepare for hurricanes and other emergencies.

After the drill, give participants an opportunity to offer feedback about their experience. Encourage them to suggest improvements on your organization's ability to communicate effectively with employees in the event of a hurricane or other severe weather. Collect participant feedback through notes from individual or group discussions, electronic or paper surveys, comment cards, or suggestion boxes.

## SAMPLE NOTIFICATIONS

The following are samples of notifications you might send to participants before, during, and after the hurricane alert drill. You can customize them with specific details about your organization, your facility, and your area. These notifications can be sent by email, text, or any other means of communication you commonly use. Make sure all communications clearly convey that this is a drill and not an actual hurricane.

## INTRODUCE AMERICA'S PREPAREATHON! TO EMPLOYEES

**Suggested Timing:** One week before the day of the drill

**Appropriate for:** Text alert, email, letter, intranet, staff meeting

**Subject Line:** America's [Or your organization's name] PrepareAthon! for Hurricane Safety

To All Employees,

On [Date], [Name of organization] will participate in America's PrepareAthon!, a national initiative to increase the number of people in America who understand the disasters that could happen in their community and take steps to increase their preparedness. Please plan to take part! It takes less than 30 minutes and could make all the difference for your safety and well-being. Please spread the word to your coworkers so they participate as well.

### WHAT TO EXPECT

On [Date], [Name of company] will test its emergency notifications to employees to simulate how we will communicate with you in the event of a hurricane. We will remind you of company policies. This drill will help you imagine a severe hurricane, think through how you would respond, and take simple steps to improve your readiness.

### GET PREPARED

Your personal preparedness is important. The America's PrepareAthon! website includes preparedness guides for different hazards, including *How to Prepare for a Hurricane*. Go to [www.ready.gov/prepare](http://www.ready.gov/prepare) to read more.

Thank you in advance for participating. We value your safety. If you have questions about America's PrepareAthon! and our participation in this campaign, please contact [Point of contact].

## BEGIN DRILL / ANNOUNCE HURRICANE WATCH

**Suggested Timing:** Send out or announce at 1 p.m. on the day of the drill. (*Beginning at 1 p.m. follow the sample schedule above; you may modify drill notification times to accommodate your work schedule.*) You may also consider coordinating this drill with the timing of the hurricane preparedness discussion noted above.

**Appropriate for:** Email, alert/notification systems

**Subject Line:** THIS IS A DRILL: Hurricane Watch in Effect

Attention Employees,

### THIS IS A DRILL.

At 8 a.m., the National Hurricane Center reported that after a week in warm, open waters, Hurricane Milo is approximately 200 miles off the coast of [Local shoreline]. The local office of the National Hurricane Center issued a hurricane watch for large portions of the coast, including [Insert community]. Currently a Category 1 hurricane,

Milo continues to gain strength and is projected to make landfall within 72 hours. Forecasters are already warning of the potential for this storm to become an extremely powerful Category 4 hurricane.

*A **hurricane watch** means hurricane conditions (sustained winds of 74 miles per hour or higher) are **possible** within the specified area. Because hurricane preparedness activities (such as boarding windows) become difficult once winds reach tropical storm force, the hurricane watch is issued 48 hours in advance of the anticipated onset of tropical-storm-force winds.*

We will continue to monitor the weather as it evolves through [List the monitoring services you are using, such as All Hazards NOAA Weather Radio, National Hurricane Center, or local radio] and emergency notifications from officials.

Everyone should remain alert to this situation. Attached are our emergency procedures and policies, including information on office closures, telecommuting and communications, and emergency operations in case the situation worsens.

If you have questions about what local alerts to sign up for, please contact [Point of contact].

## ISSUE HURRICANE WARNING

**Suggested Timing:** Send out or announce at 1:30 p.m. on the day of the drill.

**Appropriate for:** Email, alert/notification systems

**Subject Line:** THIS IS A DRILL: Hurricane Warning in Effect

Attention Employees,

**THIS IS A DRILL.**

**OFFICE CLOSED TOMORROW DUE TO SEVERE WEATHER.**

At 1:15 p.m., the local National Hurricane Center office issued a hurricane warning for [Insert community]. Hurricane Milo is a Category 3 storm, with its center projected to make landfall in our area within the next 36 hours. A storm surge of 13 to 18 feet is forecast near and to the east of where the center will make landfall. The governor has declared a state of emergency and issued an evacuation order for [Insert community]. There is significant traffic across our area due to evacuations.

*A **hurricane warning** means hurricane conditions (sustained winds of 74 miles per hour or higher) are **expected** somewhere within the specified area. Because hurricane preparedness activities become difficult once winds reach tropical storm force, the hurricane warning is issued 36 hours in advance of the anticipated onset of tropical-storm-force winds.*

Our offices will be closed tomorrow at a minimum. Attached is a copy of the company's telework policies and procedures. We will contact you via email and the company website to communicate updates as the situation evolves. Please prepare yourselves and your families for the storm. Stay informed by checking apps, local media and other resources for up-to-date weather information.

**This is a drill:** Take a few minutes to imagine if this were really happening—if a severe hurricane was threatening our area right now. What steps would you need to take in the next 24 hours to be able to evacuate? How would you stay informed about the path of the hurricane and notifications from officials about evacuation?

Take the next 10 minutes and sign up for local alerts and warnings systems to stay informed and monitor the changing weather conditions using the attached *Be Smart. Know Your Alerts and Warnings*.

## END DRILL / ANNOUNCE ALL CLEAR

**Suggested Timing:** Send out or announce at 1:37 p.m.

**Appropriate for:** Email, alert/notification systems

**Subject Line:** THIS IS A DRILL: All Clear

Attention Employees,

### THE HURRICANE DRILL IS OVER.

We conducted this drill and included a hurricane preparedness discussion at our meeting today because hurricanes are possible in this area and it's important to prepare.

**[Name of company]** monitors weather conditions and will inform employees of changing weather conditions that could impact our area.

We hope you took a moment to sign up for local alerts and warnings and familiarize yourself with our emergency policies and procedures. Please take this opportunity to talk with your family about preparing for a hurricane and other possible disasters. We encourage you to create a family communication and evacuation plan. Thank you for taking part!

To learn more about simple steps that will help you survive and recover from hurricanes and other major disasters, visit [www.ready.gov/prepare](http://www.ready.gov/prepare).

## CONDUCT A POST-DRILL DISCUSSION

After your day of action, ask participants to give feedback on their experiences. It is generally best if this can occur within a week of the exercise to keep the experience fresh. Encourage participants to offer ideas for improving the organization's hurricane preparedness. Their input is valuable for improving your organization's safety. Collect participant feedback through notes from individual or group discussions, electronic or paper surveys, comment cards, or suggestion boxes.

Below is a sample script for a post-drill group discussion. If you prefer, you can also send these questions as a survey or include them on a comment card. You may also want to offer participants a way to provide anonymous feedback.

## SCRIPT FOR POST-DRILL GROUP DISCUSSION

Use the list of questions below to get the discussion started. Make sure everyone gets the chance to provide feedback.

*It is important to pay attention to the emotional reactions of participants during the discussion. If you notice anyone expressing discomfort or anxiety, adjust the conversation to minimize the participant's discomfort. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's Disaster Technical Assistance Center provides a host of materials for use when discussing disasters. These materials are available at [www.samhsa.gov/dtac/](http://www.samhsa.gov/dtac/).*

**FACILITATOR:** Thank you for your participation in our America's PrepareAthon! day of action to be better prepared for possible disasters. I want to take a few minutes to talk about the drill and what we learned, as well as what we can do for the future. Your comments and feedback may be shared with management as we continue to improve our ability to prepare for hurricanes.



1. What did you think of the drill?
2. What did you learn?
3. What are some of the strengths or weaknesses regarding how we communicated with you about the drill and the information we provided?
4. What are some things that surprised you as you thought through how your family would evacuate? Was transportation a concern? Were your personal documents stored somewhere safe?
5. In a real disaster, would you be able to get in touch with your family? Do you know the emergency plans and policies of your children's school(s)?
6. What are some things you plan to do over the next couple of weeks to make yourself and your family better prepared to act if you need to evacuate?
7. What are some next steps we should take as an organization to improve our preparedness?

**FACILITATOR:** Does anyone have anything else they would like to add before we conclude? I want to thank each of you for participating in this drill. We are committed to your safety and will provide updates on any changes we make as a result of the drill or other preparedness planning. We also encourage everyone to talk about hurricane preparedness with your families, friends, and neighbors. Thank you.

## **FOLLOW UP WITH LOCAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT ORGANIZATIONS**

If you were able to connect with the local emergency management organization prior to your day of action to find out how many subscribers got their local alerts/warnings at that time, contact them again to see whether the number had increased since you conducted the drill. Reiterate that your organization is committed to employee safety and preparedness, and that you would welcome suggestions for improving the organization's ability to prepare for and recover from local disasters.